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Functioning Elders: Solving A Doctrinal Dispute

Alright, we have seen the formation of the diaconate and the elderate and we have seen the qualifications of the deacon and the elder, today we want to get into passages that show the function of elders, they show elders in action, doing what they were designed to do. And remember, there are two spheres of life where there is need in God's household; one, there are spiritual needs and two, there are material needs. That simply falls out of the fact that we are spirit-material beings, we are body and spirit which when combined is a human soul. And it's the whole man that needs ministering to, both body and spirit. The deacons mainly minister to the bodily needs, the physical needs of the believer and the elders oversee both the spiritual and the physical but primarily they minister to the spiritual needs. The two great spiritual needs are prayer and ministry of the word. This is what the elders should never neglect. For a church to be spiritually healthy it must have elders who are strong in prayer and teaching of the word, they are indispensable to spiritual health.

So we're going to look at two passages that demonstrate how the elders in the NT times ministered the word and how they prayed. These won't be exhaustive models of how elders should function in these two areas but they do give us samples of it and it's helpful to have a model. I can teach you the concept of what they do but in and of themselves concepts are abstract and theoretical and since we're all Greeks here, our heritage is Greek philosophy, whether we realize it or not, every one of us has been permeated with Greek ways of thinking. And as Greeks we're fine with abstract, theoretical thought, we like thinking high and lofty ideals, as long as it's kept in our thinking we think we're fine. But the Bible, while it contains abstract and theoretical concepts, particularly in the NT, its basic thought form is Hebraic and the Hebrews thought concretely, they thought experimentally, it wasn't much use

as theory, it had to have a basis in concrete reality and it had to work out in history. So this sample is good for us in that it shows us how the abstract, theoretical concepts of an elder work out in concrete reality.

Now this will give you an example of the kinds of things elders should be doing. You may have an idea of what elders do or what you think they should do. But I'm going to show you from Scripture what they really should be doing and you'll see that this correlates nicely with their qualifications. The qualifications that are listed in 1 Tim and Titus fit them for their function. So we are looking now at their function. We'll take the elders first, in coming weeks we'll pick up the deacons.

So if you turn to Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem. This is the first Church Council. Prior to this you had the apostles. And the apostles were the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone, Eph 2:20. Jesus gave the apostles the great commission in Acts 1:8. They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth of the death and resurrection of Christ. In Acts 2 the church began in Jerusalem and the apostles stayed huddled around Jerusalem until the widow controversy arose and that led to the formation of the diaconate in Acts 6:1-7. The diaconate was formed to handle the physical needs of these widows, the dispensing of benevolence in a just and wise way so the apostles could dedicate their time to the spiritual needs, prayer and ministry of the word. And due to this widow's controversy and the formation of the diaconate the witness was blown out of Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria. And therefore the apostles spent less and less time in Jerusalem. So to compensate for their absence they appointed elders in the church at Jerusalem, we find them in Acts 11:30. Finally the gospel spread to the remotest parts of the earth through the apostle Paul and Barnabas on their 1st missionary journey and as they went from city to city they would evangelize and train the new believers and appoint elders, many of them Gentile, that's Acts 14:23.

By Acts 15 a strange situation has begun with all these Gentiles coming into the Church and so the first big doctrinal conflict arises. And to solve it a church council is called at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where the church began, Jerusalem is where the founding apostles were located, so it's logical that the council convened at Jerusalem.

So let's watch verse 1, here comes the doctrinal problem. **Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."**

They were coming down from Judea to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, they had just arrived home from the 1st Missionary Journey, now these guys enter their turf and start teaching their converts, most of them Gentile, **unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved.** Now why are they doing this at this time? Because Paul and Barnabas just got back from the 1st missionary journey. And now you have a large number of Gentiles responding to the gospel without being circumcised. And quite frankly these Jews didn't like that. They didn't like Paul putting Jew and Gentile on an equal plane, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, all together, we don't like that.

Now we could go into a big spiel about dispensationalism and the differences between Israel and the Church here but we don't have time. The long of the short of it is that Acts is a transitional period of history and so it's understandable there would be confusion. On one hand you have these men who say to be a Christian you have to be circumcised and on the other hand Paul and Barnabas say you do not. So there were Jews that were confused about what dispensation they were in. The confusion was due to the fact the Messiah had come, He had offered the nation the kingdom and they had rejected the kingdom so their Messiah was crucified. With this new situation what dispensation are we in? Are we still under the dispensation of the Law or are we in a new dispensation? Because if we're back under the Law then the Gentiles need to be circumcised so they can enter into Judaism, but if we're in a new dispensation then there are new rules that come with a new dispensation. And so the apostles and elders are going to solve this problem by showing that new rules have been revealed and they're going to confirm these new rules by proving it from past revelation. Those are the two things they're going to use, recent revelation, recent things happening with Gentiles and old revelation, things the OT predicted and on the basis of those two things they're going to solve the dispute. So there's a lot of content that must be understood by elders to resolve doctrinal disputes. And that's why you have to have men who are highly qualified men, peculiarly interested in this book so they can know what passages are involved and solve it.

Now in Acts 15 there are two arguments that are being used. One in verse 1 down in Antioch and one in verse 5 up in Jerusalem. The argument that makes it to Jerusalem in verse 5 is the one that gets debated at the council so that's what we're interested in. Acts 15:5, some of the Pharisees who had believed claim that **it was needful to circumcise them** (the Gentile believers), **and to command them to keep the Law of Moses**. Now somehow they are saying their salvation is inadequate, it's not enough to believe, faith alone is not enough, you must also be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses.

Now there's no way you can meet this argument on the basis of the OT Law, and that's why they have a council to deal with it. And the issue is what about Gentile believers? Do they have to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses? Why was this a problem? Because they're in a transitional period. Acts is a transitional book. They have the OT Law and that was the standard for the earlier dispensation. But they don't know what dispensation they're in now. If they are in the earlier dispensation then they do need to follow the Law of Moses. If they're not then what is the standard they should follow? The Law of Christ. But that standard isn't revealed yet. That's the difficulty. The standards of the Law of Christ are gradually being revealed. That's why they had the gift of prophecy active during this time. But by Acts 15 what new revelation had been written. They had Matthew, James and Galatians, that's all they could possibly have had, plus the oral reports of what Jesus had done. And so it's a tough question to answer at the time what these Gentile believers should do. And the reason is because the Law of Christ was only partly written. And that's why later Paul will write in 1 Cor 13, we know in part, we prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes, prophecy and knowledge will cease, tongues will stop, those are all gifts given to write this new revelation. But it wasn't all there yet. So that's what the doctrinal dispute is all about. What are these Gentiles supposed to do? What dispensation are we in?

Now let's see how they handle it, verse 6, **The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter**. Notice, not every believer, this is not put to a congregational vote. And every Tom, Dick and Harry puts in for their opinion on the matter and we throw all our ignorance in one big basket and see who's ignorance comes out on top. That's not how doctrinal disputes are solved. It's solved by **the apostles and the elders**. But do notice that in

verse 12 other believers are present in the room, all they're doing is listening, they're not engaging in the discussion, but they're watching and learning how the mature believers, the apostles and the elders are going to resolve this thing. So it is the elders who solve these kinds of disputes but it might be wise for elders to solve them out in the open, not behind closed doors in the smoke-filled room but out in the open so other believers can watch and learn how they handle Scripture. And so verse 6, there are your leaders, **the apostles and the elders.**

Verse 7, **After there had been much debate,** another little principle, all viewpoints are considered in the decision making. Real decision making must consider all viewpoints; they may be rejected but they must be considered, else we overlook something that may be important to the issue. And so the elders and apostles allowed opposing viewpoints to be aired, they considered them and debated them. Does this line up with the word of God? Because that's what matters, not my opinion or your opinion but God's word.

Then **Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, in the early days,** that means "a long time ago" and it clearly refers back to Acts 10. Acts 10 was ten years ago. What happened in Acts 10? God chose Peter out of all the other Jewish believers to go to the Gentiles, and the way he did that was Peter was up on a rooftop in Joppa waiting for lunch, lunch was being prepared and he got hungry and he had a vision of food up there, the Holy Spirit showed him the most disgusting menu he'd ever seen, clean and unclean all mixed together and just at the time he saw the vision the third time a dispatch from Cornelius' house arrived.

That's what he was chosen for, **that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.** And notice the beginning of the verse, **Brethren, you know** this, this was not new knowledge, Peter was not giving them any new information, they'd known this for ten years. So in the initial argument verse 7 is that you know historical precedent, you know that God chose me and you know what God did through me, Gentiles heard the word of the gospel through me and they believed. So this is historical precedent.

Verse 8, **And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;** them is the Gentiles and us is

the Jews, there's no distinction, we all received the Holy Spirit in the same way. Verse 9, **and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.** This is all key to the argument because part of the dispute is over how God cleanses the heart? Does he cleanse the heart of a Gentile when he undergoes the physical rite of circumcision? Does He do it as they follow the Law of Moses? And Peter's point is none of that happened at Cornelius' house. All they did was believe, their hearts were cleansed and they received the Holy Spirit. There's no distinction Peter says between Jews and Gentiles. Salvation is always the same way, there's only one way of salvation, by grace through faith.

Verse 10, **“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”** In other words, here's the Mosaic Law, 613 laws, he says the Mosaic Law was a **yoke**, that means a heavy burden, Christ said my burden is easy, my yoke is light. And so by piling the law on the neck of the Gentile disciples they were weighing them down with unnecessary things.

Verse 11, his arguments finally amount to this, **But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”** So again it's the main idea and what's the main idea? That the way of salvation is the same for all men; both Jew and Gentile are saved **through the grace of the Lord Jesus.** There is only one way of salvation. Therefore, what right do you people have coming in here and saying that the Gentiles have to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law? You have no basis for saying that, it violates historical precedent.

And verse 12, **All the people kept silent,** they're just taking it all in, they're listening to all of this. And then we have some more historical precedent. Barnabas and Paul took this as an opportunity to heap on some more historical precedent. **and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.** That's more historical precedence, it confirms that God had done the same thing among them He had done with Peter, which is all fine and dandy, but James, he was an elder and the half-brother of Jesus Christ, realizes something isn't quite clicking. They've heard Peter, they've heard Paul and Barnabas, but that's not enough, these

people aren't buying it. So verse 13, what does James do? **After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.** And the thing James says here is very important. There's a principle here. You can stand there all day long with your historical precedent and say God did this and God did that. But what do you have to have to support that God is really the one who did it? How do you know God did it? How do you know you weren't deceived? You better have some Scripture to back it up.

So James isn't going to add anything new to Peter's argument, in terms of the argument, what he's doing is showing from Scripture that what Peter is arguing has a Scriptural basis. The bottom line in Jewish thought is that you better have some Scripture to back up what you're saying because if you don't we're not going to buy it. They didn't care how many people saw it, they didn't care how many people experienced it, what mattered was do you have Scripture to back it up or not, over and out. At least they had their epistemology correct. Today, it's exactly the reverse, you can cite Scripture all day but unless you experienced it it's not true. Well not for these men, you could experience all kinds of things, but unless some Scripture actually authenticated the experience it was not accepted.

So verse 14, **"Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. ¹⁵"With this the words of the Prophets agree,** with what do the Prophets agree? With Peter; that God would save Gentiles. And notice, not just one prophet agrees but prophets, plural. So he begins to cite, **just as it is written,** that's an expression for Scripture, and he cites two prophets, one is Amos, vv 16, 17 and part of 18, and the other is Isaiah, the tail end of verse 18 in Isaiah. And the Prophets said, **'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, ¹⁷SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' ¹⁸SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.** Now the question always is how is what Amos and Isaiah said proving what Peter said? This is a tough passage so let's make some observations. One thing we can clearly say is it's a prophecy; over and over you see in Amos, I will, I will, I will, I will, the future tense. So it was something future from the time of Amos and Isaiah. And the second observation is that James saw something in their predictions that proves

Peter preached to Gentiles and they were saved apart from circumcision. But the difficulty is following the line of argument.

So let's turn to Amos 9 to get the original context. In Amos 9:1, "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said, "Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, And break them on the heads of them all! Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword; They will not have a fugitive who will flee, Or a refugee who will escape." It's a message of judgment by military defeat. And who was Amos? Amos was a prophet of doom to the northern kingdom. He's predicting their judgment by military defeat, a judgment which came in 721BC. The northern kingdom is going down, they are going into exile. So it's a message of judgment in Amos 9, and it goes on through verse 10 but you can see in vv 11-12 final salvation, finally the exile will end and the Jewish nation will be restored and it's that restoration passage that James cites.

So let's read, Amos 9:11, "In that day," in what day? In the last days, we know it as the day of the Lord, the day when God judges the nations and restores Israel. "In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; ¹²That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this." And then it goes on to describe the agriculture, the infrastructure and security of Israel, verse 15, "I will also plant them on their land, And they will not again be rooted out from their land Which I have given them," It's a straightforward passage on the restoration of Israel to the land in the last days. So we would say Amos 9:11-15, has not yet been fulfilled. Alright, fine then, why is James quoting it to solve this dispute over Gentile salvation?

Well, to interpret any document correctly you have to go back to the way the author of the document thought. You have to go back and figure out how Jews quoted the OT? And if we can find that out then we have an objective criteria. And this has been done. It's in the literature; you can pick up Emil Shurer's definitive work *The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* where he shows that the rabbi's of Jesus' day quoted the OT in four different waysⁱ and that the NT authors were using these same four methods.ⁱ This is very important for an elder to learn because throughout the NT the NT authors quote the OT. The question is how are they doing it? And either

you do a lot of historical research and find out for yourself how or you just make up what you think they're doing, which is no help to anyone. It doesn't matter what it means to you, it matters what the original author meant. Now Emil Shurer was a Jewish believer who was very familiar with 1st century Judaism and how the rabbi's taught in the synagogue, how they quoted the OT and so forth. His argument is that all the NT authors, Jesus included, attended synagogue, and they were exposed to the ways the rabbi's quoted the OT. And his point is that they are not breaking with their way of quoting the OT, they're just doing it under divine inspiration. So in other words, God is taking the natural background of these men, their culture, their training and He's using that! Is that so odd? No, it's the same thing God did with their vocations - Luke was a medical doctor, does that come through in his writings? Yes. Matthew was a tax collector. Does that come through in his writings? Yes. There's a difference between Luke and Matthew. Peter was a fisherman. Does that come through in his writings? Of course. The natural background of these men was protected. And this is just another example. They took the four ways they had learned in synagogue from the rabbi's to quote the OT and they used them under divine inspiration. Now I don't have time to go through them all, but an elder today, if he's going to be a good student of the NT should learn these four ways and I'd direct you to Arnold Fruchtenbaum's work *Messianic Christology* where he summarizes the four ways they quoted the OT, or I think I've got a paper you can have or you can look at Robert Thomas' book *Evangelical Hermeneutics* where he outlines a similar approach he calls ISPA, *Inspired Sensus Plenior Application*, I think Arnold's approach is easier to follow so I'll list the four categories. First was literal prophecy + literal fulfillment. That is the most straightforward way. Everybody sees that. Second was literal + application. This one means there's a similarity between two events in history and so they cite it because of the similarity. Third is literal + typological. This is where they see a pattern in history and they cite the pattern as looking forward to someone else, it's a more complex set of parallels. Adam typified Christ, that type of thing, there are a series of similarities. And fourth is summary and summary is where they don't quote the OT but they summarize what the OT taught.

James is using one of the four ways in Acts 15. It's one of the more complex ways but it's a variation of the literal prophecy + literal fulfillment technique. He's not saying Amos is fulfilled, but he is saying that Gentile salvation has to occur before Amos can be literally fulfilled. So there's no jettisoning of the

prophecy of Amos 9:11ff. Amos 9:11ff still remains unfulfilled today. But James was such a good Bible student that he picked up from Amos 9:11-15 that Gentile salvation had to precede its fulfillment. Verse 16 **'AFTER THESE THINGS,** now that's not what Amos said, Amos said "In that day," so James has changed the quote to fit his purpose here, his purpose is to show Gentile salvation is genuine. So **'AFTER THESE THINGS.** After what things? After Gentile salvation, **I will return,** that's the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, **AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT.** That's not the physical tabernacle built in the book of Exodus that ended up being replaced by the temple under Solomon. The word for **TABERNACLE** is the word for a makeshift booth or shelter, it gave protection and when this was written the booth was in disrepair because the kingdom was divided and you had ten of the tribes in the north that had said two centuries before we have no part in the house of David, they didn't want to be under the protection of the house of David, so for Amos to say of the Messiah **I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT** is to say I will rebuild the house of David and bring all the tribes of Israel under its protection, I will take the divided kingdoms and unite them under the Davidic dynasty. So this is the restoration of Israel and it's yet to occur, it will occur at the Second Advent when the embodiment of the Davidic dynasty, Jesus Christ returns and re-establishes the kingdom.

Then verse 17 tells us why, the goal of this re-establishment of the kingdom. **SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND,** that's the Gentiles, **MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,'** That's clear, when the Jews are re-united under the Davidic king in the kingdom then the Gentiles who are called by name of the Davidic king will stream to Jerusalem to see their King. Now that we know what the passage is teaching, ask yourself, had any of this happened? Had the house of David been restored? Had the twelve tribes of Israel come under the house of David? No. that had not happened. What had happened? Gentiles had called on His name. So the point is, James says, the prophet Amos predicted a restoration of Israel in the kingdom with saved Gentiles seeking to know more about the Lord. It's all in the kingdom. But what do you have to do to get into the kingdom? You have to be saved. No unbelievers are going to enter the kingdom. But Amos pictures Gentile believers in the kingdom. So what has to happen prior to the kingdom? Gentiles have to be saved.

And what have Paul and Barnabas been arguing, we went out there and Gentiles were saved and they want to know more about the Lord. What had Peter argued - I went into Cornelius' house, I preached the gospel and the Holy Spirit baptized them as He baptized us, they didn't even get circumcised. So who am I to get in God's way? So see what's happening? See why James is quoting Amos? Amos predicted saved Gentiles in the kingdom. And if Amos predicted saved Gentiles in the kingdom then the only way they could have gotten there is if Gentiles are being saved before that kingdom arrives. So he's noticed that something different is happening now and that something different is that God is calling out Gentiles from every nation to be saved in advance of the kingdom. And when is the council taking place? In advance of the kingdom. So that's why James quotes Amos. For Amos to be literally fulfilled Gentiles have to get saved in advance of the kingdom.

And so James says what Peter explained as happening down at Cornelius' house and what Barnabas and Paul explained as happening in Galatia must happen before Amos can be literally fulfilled. Therefore we agree that God is saving Gentiles in the same way that He saves Jews, by grace through faith alone, apart from circumcision. Now that takes a lot of Bible study and that shows you how sharp these elders were. They thought these things through, they thought through implications. And that's something you want to learn to do when you study the Scriptures. Ask the Lord to show you the implications, what other tangential truths are involved here? That's a very godly question to be asking. That's what the Lord wants an elder to be doing. Going deeper, thinking more, advancing, pushing the envelope.

Alright, let's come to the conclusion in verse 19. **“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, ²⁰but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.** So they're going to write it down, this is like a confession or a creed and they're going to pass it around to the churches. Everywhere Paul and Barnabas go they're going to take this confession and they're going to say, follow this, this decision was made, this clarified that indeed Gentiles are saved apart from circumcision and so there's no reason to raise a counter objection, it's already been solved and so apart from these three or four things don't bother them. What are the three

or four things? What is the point of the Gentiles abstaining from these things? The bottom line of the argument is that if Gentile believers have to forego a few freedoms for the sake of the gospel then big deal, who cares. For example, **abstaining from things contaminated by idols**, that's a dietary issue. And the issue these Gentiles would face was what's more important on Sunday afternoon lunch, eating BBQ that was sacrificed to an idol down at the local temple and offending a Jewish unbeliever or abstaining? Obviously the Christian way of life says we can eat those things but it doesn't say because I can I should. There's no point in running Jews off from the gospel by petty little things like food. Just abstain. So they instruct the Gentiles to forego some of their freedom for the sake of the gospel and all the abstentions are along those same lines. For verse 21, **“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”** The Jews listened to Torah in synagogue week after week after week and these three or four things were built up in the Jewish conscience as very sensitive issues. So he's just saying it is best if you just abstain from these four things for the sake of Jewish evangelism.

Now let's summarize. There are seven principles for how the elder functions, you may find more, there are more, but here are some basics. First, it is the elders who solve doctrinal disputes not the congregation, not the deacons, the elders. And the reason is why? Because they're the most mature men in the word of God. They have to analyze very carefully. The Bible is the most abused book the world has ever known so you better know this book. Second, they did allow the congregation to watch them solve it, and if you think about it, how mature believers solve doctrinal problems could be very instructive to other believers as to how to properly handle this book. Third, in solving it the elders considered all the views, they were not afraid of certain opinions, they knew they had the truth in the word of God, so let's just get it all out on the table and see what our options are. The fourth principle is you better rest your final case on Scripture. Always the final authority is the Scripture. Someone can say this happened to me, this is my experience and you can't deny my experience. But God says yes, I can, this book tells you how to interpret your experience, it tells you whether your experience is valid or not. The fifth principle is that obviously an elder has to be a tremendous Bible student, it takes a tremendous amount of biblical knowledge to solve these kinds of doctrinal issues. It is not something that just gets hammered out in

five minutes. And it is not something that we just conclude is my opinion vs your opinion. No, it gets worked out by pouring out mental sweat over this book. And sixth, once they are hammered out the conclusion should be written down and clarified, a creed should be written so to speak. That's what came out of the Council of Jerusalem and it was passed around to all the churches.

Now to elaborate that point I want to conclude by moving down through church history and showing that the church has solved its doctrinal disputes based on the council of Jerusalem. In the early centuries after Christ there were important councils that convened from time to time. Why did they do that? Because of heresies like the one they faced in Acts 15. Paul predicted in Acts 20 and church history shows that Satan was busy spawning heresy in the early centuries of the church. Heresy came from people inside the church, it came from people outside the church, it came from women like Jezebel, and it came from men like Arius. And the early church was smart enough to recognize that hey, we can't just let this go unchallenged, false doctrine is like a ravenous wolf and it will rip up the sheep, so we have got to get together and clarify what we believe. That's part of what elders do, they refute false teaching. And so they gathered at Church councils and discussed the great doctrinal issues and out of that came the early church creeds, the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedon Creed, all the great creeds. And they didn't write these out over lunch; they worked it out over a series of months and sometimes years where daily they would study and discuss deep theological issues and then look at each word, it's meaning, it's placement in the creed, they were very carefully articulated. So let's make a point here about creeds, doctrinal statements, confessions and the like. Doctrinal statements are the same thing; they're a written statement of what you believe. There are two errors you can make when you consider them. One error is to reject them altogether. We have "No creed but Christ!" That's the saying of creedless Christianity these days, no creed but Christ. But then if you ask, well what Christ then are you talking about? The Christ in the creeds is very God of God, very light of light, virgin born, begotten of the Father. Do you mean to say that Christ is not very God of God? That He is not begotten of the Father? That He is not virgin born? Because if that's what you're saying then your Christ is not the Christ of Scripture. And you do have a creed, a creed that rejects the Christ of Scripture. So we're not against creeds. However, a second error that is equally egregious is to exalt creeds

and doctrinal statements to the level of Scripture. Now once you've done that as Roman Catholicism does, then eventually the creeds become the final authority and the authority gets vested in men, in men's interpretations of the Scripture. So to avoid these two errors the proper place of creeds is that they are very important but they must always be subjected to the Scriptures. We can and should use them to clarify what we believe the Scriptures themselves are saying. But we must always read them as subject to further analysis under the light of Scripture. And that brings us to the fifth point, and that is that creeds should not be frozen in time, they must be updated over time. Why is this true? There are two basic reasons. One is this; is the Holy Spirit still teaching men? Or is He done with that? Of course He's still teaching men. And as we study the Scriptures further we discover more, we clarify more, etc...So we have to update the creeds to meet the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Second is this; is Satan still attacking with false doctrine? Absolutely. So there are always new deceptions that are coming out and we have to update the creeds and confessions to cut out those new deceptions. That's how the creeds came about in the first place; they were worded to cut out specific heresies that had come into the church.

So let's conclude with an example. It's very important for any Christian institution, seminary or church to stay up to speed with current movements in Christianity and to evaluate them according to Scripture and then update their statements to block them because if they don't they become vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Each year, faculty at many seminaries must sign the doctrinal statement of the institution in order to maintain employment. You can imagine the pressure this places on professors who may have, through course of study and interaction with others, developed a difference with the doctrinal statement. What about my retirement? What about my benefits? Etc...These pressures have resulted in extremely creative interpretations of doctrinal statements in order to maintain employment. For example, here's part of the doctrinal statement at DTS. "We believe that three of these dispensations or rules of life are the subject of extended revelation in the Scriptures, viz., the dispensation of the Mosaic law, the present dispensation of grace, and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom. We believe that these are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused, as they are chronologically successive." Dr Darrell Bock, professor at DTS, published a book in 1991 that rejects that these dispensations are not to be intermingled or confused and are chronologically successive. How then can he annually

sign the doctrinal statement to keep his employment? Answer, he would say that “we” in the statement refers to the “collective institution” and not to me, the professor. As a collective institution “we” believe that. As an individual professor “I” do not. Although the authors who wrote the statement intended that “we” be understood as each member of the faculty, Dr Bock has a non-biblical philosophy of language that allows him to manipulate pronouns to mean what he wants them to mean rather than what the author intended them to mean. The actual problem and what must be shored up in the doctrinal statement is the particular philosophy of language the institution professes. Language is the area Satan had been attacking since the 1960’s and since DTS did not update their statement to protect against this attack it has now infiltrated and nearly taken over completely this institution. That’s why you have to really be on top of things and it’s easy for me to say in hindsight. I’m not throwing rocks at the DTS faculty, but I am saying that you have got to realize that Satan is slick and just because you wrote a doctrinal statement last week does not mean that this week Satan hasn’t found a loophole to get around it. So it takes a lot of work to stay on top of these things and it’s naïve to think that once you put something in a written document that it’s stone and it can’t be moved, uh, uh, uh...that itself is a deception

ⁱ *Later Judaism discovered that there is a fourfold meaning of Scriptures, which is indicated by the word **pardes** (Paradise), viz. 1. **pshat**, the simple or literal meaning; 2. **remez** (suggestion), the meaning arbitrarily imported into it; 3. **drash** (investigation), the meaning deduced by investigation; and 4. **sod** (mystery), the theosophic meaning. (pg. 348). Later Dr David L Cooper streamlined this approach. He called *pshat* literal prophecy + literal fulfillment, *remez*, literal prophecy + application, *drash*, literal + typology and *sod*, summary.*

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